

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Passover Controversy Unraveled

March 2001

Dear Brethren:

Nothing has fostered more debate over centuries among professing Christians than questions surrounding the Passover at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Did Christ really keep the Passover with His disciples, or was it just a special meal? How could Christ have simultaneously eaten the Passover and also been the Passover Lamb? What night did this meal take place, and how did Christ's practice compare to that of the existing Jews? Studying the Paschal controversies beginning in the second century, the mountain of contradictory historical writings which have since ensued, and the proliferation of endless debate among modern scholars today, only confirms how elusive the facts really are.

Ironically, many of those who were once called to a knowledge of the Truth through the teaching of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong—who came to understand the simplicity of these answers through the divine inspiration of Jesus Christ—have by-in-large rejected that knowledge and embraced again the contradictions of the deceived. Espoused today by those who should know better are endless papers advancing personalized interpretations of the gospel writings and historical works, all claiming to represent the only "clear and inescapable" truth from the Bible. Yet what they actually prove is the proclivity of human minds to generate substantiation for concepts of their own thinking, once the Holy Spirit has been rejected.

What is that simple truth we were once taught—that which reconciles all of the seeming contradictions—confirming a brilliant, harmonious picture of God's purposeful work? The real answer is incredibly inspiring.

Why the Confusion?

What is the main source of confusion for Biblical scholars? Most believe the Synoptists (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) contradict the Apostle John regarding the events of Jesus Christ's last meal. The Synoptists firmly state Jesus was keeping the literal Passover with His disciples.

And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and *prepare us the passover*, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, *where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?* And he shall show you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and *they made ready the passover*. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire *I have desired to eat this passover with you* before I suffer (Luke 22:8–15) [emphasis ours].

Notice also Matthew 26:17–20 and Mark 14:12–16, asserting this was the literal Passover meal. Yet John's account causes great consternation because he seems to indicate Christ ate the meal with His disciples *before* the arrival of the Passover. The reason for this assumption is that John does not state directly—unlike the others—that the meal was a Passover service.

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him (John 13:1–2).

This text alone would not be a problem, except for two other statements later recorded by John.

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover (John 18:28).

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! (John 19:14).

Here we find that on the morning after this meal, when Christ was being condemned to death, it appears the Jews were yet looking forward to eating the Passover. But if the other Gospel writers are accurate—that Jesus really did eat the literal Passover the previous night—how then can John's account be true? A number of scholars are content to believe the Gospel writers contradict one another, and then pick the writer with which they agree.

One example is the debate over John's placing the time of Jesus' trial at "about the sixth hour." Mark 15:25 tells us He was crucified at "the third hour." Those contending that the

Jews—as well as Jesus—kept a Nisan 15 Passover, tell us it means Christ was tried at noon (the sixth hour in Hebrew time), but was held over one additional day before being crucified at 9 a.m. the following morning. By this reasoning, they place Christ's meal with the disciples *two days* previous to His death, attempting to prove that meal could not have been the Passover. But as we have already seen in Luke 22:8–15, Christ made it very plain He kept *the Passover* with His disciples. If this is true, how can we reconcile John's account of the trial seemingly three hours after He was crucified? The answer fitting all Gospel accounts, and supported by a number of writers, is that John was using Roman time, not Hebrew time. But it is these types of difficult passages that have led many to conclude the Gospel writers do not agree with one another.

But among those who attempt to reconcile the accounts, believing they are all inspired, there are generally five broad categories of explanations, which provide the basis for most of the technical hypotheses extant today:

- 1) Jesus did not actually eat the Passover. The real Passover was the following night. Christ instituted a special meal, or "passover" for this one unique occasion before His death. Those with this viewpoint attach themselves to the account of John, and therefore focus attention on Matthew, Mark, and Luke, attempting to prove technically that the references to Christ's Passover meal do not mean what they say.
- 2) Jesus did eat the Passover with His disciples, as made clear by the Synoptists, but Jesus kept it the same as the Jews, on the beginning of Nisan 15. These erroneously believe that Christ was crucified on the first high day of Unleavened Bread, and seek to explain John 18:28 and John 19:14 with technicalities, denying that the Jews kept their Passover a day later than Christ.
- 3) Jesus did eat a legitimate Passover with His disciples, and the Jews also ate a legitimate Passover a day later. This hypothesis is based on the proposition there was difficulty that year in determining the proper beginning of the month of Nisan through observation of the new moon, and therefore two consecutive days were authorized for the Passover meal. This theory allows one to accept both the accounts of John and the Synoptists, but as pointing to two different Passover observances. But God never authorizes such confusion.
- 4) Jesus partook of the one and only Passover, it was the very same night the Jews observed, and they were all keeping Passover on the beginning of Nisan 14. This theory correctly implies that the Jews corrupted the keeping of Passover and moved it from the beginning of the 14th to the beginning of the 15th, but erroneously places this change some time after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Under this theory—found more prominently among a few former members of the Worldwide Church of God—it is accurately believed that Christ was crucified on the day preceding the first day of Unleavened Bread. However, like those in category two above, they must also explain the contradiction of John 18:28 and John 19:14 with strained technicalities.

- 5) The last category is that which Mr. Armstrong taught from the beginning of his ministry, that Jesus *did* eat the only legitimate Passover on the beginning of Nisan 14, which was a day earlier than the Jew's observance. The Jews had long before corrupted Passover and merged it into the 15th, just as they had corrupted *many* of God's laws by that time with their own traditions.

Those scholars who are at least honest, present their theories as precisely such, and do not attempt to claim ironclad evidence from Biblical or historical sources. It is interesting however that the writings by former members of the church who have repudiated the original teachings of Mr. Armstrong, are inclined to appeal to these same scholarly works, yet asserting their theories as the "clear" teaching of the Bible; that which many scholars themselves are even hesitant to do. In the midst of all of this confusion, can we really know the truth about Christ's last Passover?

A Missing Key

Rather than tackle each technical argument by these writers—trying to isolate the truth by process of elimination—we can solve a major piece of the puzzle much more easily. You see, the key element assumed in the theories of most scholars about Christ's last Passover includes a Friday crucifixion–Sunday resurrection (Add to this some few who also argue for a Thursday crucifixion). If you read their opinions, it is amazing how consistently this false premise is found embedded within their assumptions. Ironically, this one particular error seems to model their final opinions more than any other. Perhaps even more amazing, by verifying the true time of Christ's resurrection, we are actually pointed to answers about the last Passover which elude the greatest scholastic minds.

The entire question hangs on believing the one sign Jesus Christ gave as the confirmation of His Messiahship. Those who accept His words at face value can understand the truth. Those who reject them are doomed to wander in darkness.

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:38–40).

Jesus Christ said the one and only confirmation that He was the Christ would not be His actual resurrection from the dead, but his repose in the grave for exactly three days and three nights—precisely seventy–two hours. Yet most professing Christians reject this simple truth in

favor of contrived interpretations to support a Friday crucifixion. As we will soon see, recognizing the true day of the crucifixion strips away much of the mystery and many fallacious conclusions.

The Puzzle Deciphered

Here is the simple, logical progression of facts that provides the unique answers.

First, it is impossible for Christ to have been resurrected on Sunday morning, if we believe the one and only sign He gave. Why? Jesus was laid in the tomb at or just before sundown, at the end of the day (whichever day that might have been).

When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed (Matthew 27:57–60) [emphasis ours].

Matthew 27:46 tells us Jesus died about the ninth hour, which corresponds to 3 P.M. It was therefore waning toward the end of the day—in the evening—when Joseph entombed Jesus and closed the sepulchre. Luke 23:54 affirms also that "the sabbath drew on." Therefore, if we accept that Christ laid in that tomb for precisely seventy-two hours—three days and three nights—His moment of resurrection must also have been in the evening, at or near sundown. There are many clever arguments advanced to claim this count of seventy-two hours commenced earlier, but there is no substantiation for any of them. Christ said His time in *the heart of the earth* would be as Jonah's time in the belly of the fish. Can it be any more clear? Unless we reject Christ's affirmation, there is no other conclusion. Therefore, this fact automatically rules out a Sunday morning resurrection, or *any other* morning time resurrection for that matter.

Next, as we shall see, the tomb was empty by Sunday morning when the women arrived at dawn, and this detail will help us pinpoint the next important fact. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 24:1–3). So, by dawn of the first day of the week—Sunday—Christ had already been resurrected. When, then, is the nearest *evening* preceding Sunday morning, when the resurrection must have taken place, if we accept that Christ was entombed at sundown and remained exactly seventy-two hours—and not a moment longer—in the grave? The answer is Saturday evening, just at or before sunset. Some say this cannot be so, because there is no other Scriptural reference to support it. But we

need no other! Christ gave one sign, and one sign only. He also provided the only other pieces of evidence we need, including the time of day He was entombed, and knowledge about the day that the tomb was found empty. God provided exactly the evidence needed for those of honesty to verify the truth. The specific details recorded by God mark the limits involved in the equation.

Next, if Jesus rose from the grave at sunset Saturday evening, when must He have been entombed, if we accept the singular proof of Christ's Messiahship? Exactly seventy-two hours earlier, on Wednesday evening! Therefore, the trial and crucifixion occurred on Wednesday, He was placed in the tomb as the sun was going down the same day, and that tomb was found empty Sunday morning after His resurrection, hours beforehand on Saturday evening.

What else do we therefore know? The Passover meal Christ ate with His disciples was Tuesday night, the night prior to His Wednesday crucifixion. So does this mean Christ ate His meal twenty-four hours before the real Passover? Absolutely not! We have already noted that Matthew 26:17–20, Mark 14:12–16, and Luke 22:8–15 all confirm that Christ ate *the* Passover. It was not one of two approved nights, or a special "extra" passover. Jesus Christ was perfect, and everything He did bespoke of perfect obedience to the law. Assertions otherwise are mere attempts to explain away the facts preserved in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus Christ's confirmation of the Passover on Tuesday night—by His own observance—also helps eliminate another fallacy, as we shall see.

How Many Sabbaths?

How could Wednesday be the crucifixion day if Christ died on the preparation day before the Sabbath? Does not that make it Friday, and not Wednesday? This piece of the puzzle is unraveled by recognizing there were *two* Sabbaths during Passover week. This simple fact wipes away much of the remaining confusion.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the [spirit]. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on *the sabbath day*, (*for that sabbath day was an high day*,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away (John 19:30–31) [emphasis ours].

Weight is given to the idea of a Friday crucifixion because of the assumption this Sabbath which was about to begin was the weekly Sabbath. But this is merely the natural mistake of those who are not cognizant of the Holy Days. Notice that John 19:31 tells us plainly, with special emphasis, this Sabbath was a *high day*, not just a regular weekly Sabbath. References to annual Holy Days as well as the weekly Sabbath are translated from the Greek word, *sabbaton*. The first day of Unleavened Bread is one of these annual Sabbaths, and the specific Sabbath to which John is referring, which was on Thursday that year. Notice it:

54) And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. 55) And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. 56) And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment (Luke 23:54–56) [emphasis ours].

In verse 54, the original Greek does not actually contain the definite article, as in "the" sabbath. It should be correctly translated "*a* sabbath drew on." Yet the Sabbath referenced in verse 56 absolutely uses the definite article, "the." This tells us that Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, specifically distinguished between a special high Sabbath, and a weekly Sabbath, *both* occurring during the time period chronicled.

We already determined that Christ was sealed in the tomb just before sunset. So the women did not have time to go and buy spices and ointments before this high day began on Thursday, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The fact they returned (verse 56), means they first departed from the sepulchre, and came back at a later time. Mark's account fills in the gap about their interim activities. "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him" (Mark 16:1). So, after this Holy Day ended, they *then* went to purchase spices to be used for the final burial. What work day was this? Friday, the day following the first high day of the Feast, and preceding the regular weekly Sabbath. Yet even though they purchased the spices on Friday, they did not return to the sepulchre until the weekly Sabbath was also past, early Sunday morning. "And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun" (Mark 16:2). The pieces fit together harmoniously, and without wresting the Scripture.

What other important fact do we now know from this? Since Jesus Christ was crucified on the day *preceding* the first day of Unleavened Bread (which always falls on Nisan 15), by keeping the Passover *one night earlier*, He confirmed the proper keeping of Passover on the beginning of Nisan 14! Remember, the Jews specifically avoided arresting Jesus on the Holy Day, for fear of a riot. "And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people" (Matthew 26:4–5). They carried out their plan *prior* to the beginning of the Feast, not on the first high day. And Christ proved by His personal example that the correct night to take the Passover—exactly the same night observed by ancient Israel in Egypt—was twenty-four hours before the beginning of the Feast.

The above is the single explanation that acknowledges the one and only sign Jesus Christ gave that He was the Messiah, and also fits harmoniously with every one of the Gospel accounts. Any other assertion requires rejection of an indispensable element of the equation and a contradiction of the Scripture. But recognizing and believing these facts reveals the intricate

beauty and harmony within all of the Gospel accounts. There is no contradiction or hanging loose end if we acknowledge the real Truth.

What About the Jews' Passover?

If you will recall, theory number four—described earlier—admits everything documented thus far, yet asserts that the Jews *also* kept the Passover as did Jesus, at the beginning of Nisan 14. This assumption requires them to explain John 18:28 and John 19:14, since these are the passages that seem to indicate the Jews were yet preparing for their passover on the morning after Christ had already kept it.

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover (John 18:28).

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! (John 19:14).

Mr. Armstrong accepted these statements at face value, and concluded the Jews were keeping their passover one day too late, according to their own traditions, from the corruption of God's laws over centuries. Can we prove this technically, without doubt—by an examination of the phrases in the Greek? No. But in spite of vehement claims, neither can anyone prove an alternative beyond any shadow of doubt.

The debate centers on the meaning of the word "passover." Is this a reference to the literal Pasch—the Passover service—or was John referring to another part of the festival observance? We readily admit the term "passover" was used with regard to other parts of the Feast. "Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover" (Luke 22:1). Notice also, "After two days was *the feast of the passover*, and of unleavened bread" (Mark 14:1) [emphasis ours]. This is also seen conversely since the actual Passover day was likewise called a day of unleavened bread. "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed" (Luke 22:7). Most scholars agree that the terms "passover" and "unleavened bread" could be used interchangeably, and either one of them could refer to the Pasch, the Feast, or to both together in the broad festival season. Therefore, attempting to certify one or the other from a purely technical analysis of John, chapter eighteen and nineteen, is not possible. But is there any other way to know? Indeed there is.

The Final Question

The last unanswered question of those posed at the beginning of this letter, is how could Jesus Christ have simultaneously partaken of the Passover, and also been the Passover Lamb Himself. Since He *was* that Lamb (John 1:29), should not He have been slain at the appropriate time? And if He had been slain correctly in preparation for the Passover, how could He still be alive to eat it with His disciples? Interestingly, the answer has everything to do with the Jews' passover observance. If the Jews really were keeping Passover correctly at that time, it would be more difficult to resolve this question. But there is an answer which fits harmoniously with the picture of God's plan and will; that which we received as the church in these last days.

Now before the feast of the passover, *when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father*, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, . . . (John 13:1–2) [emphasis ours].

Remember we noted earlier that unlike the Synoptists, John does not state directly in his account that the meal was the actual Passover. Yet, John 13:1 actually tells us more than one might think. Jesus knew that His hour was come. What hour was that? He was the Passover Lamb. It refers to the hour in which the lambs were to be slaughtered according to God's command (Exodus 12:5–6). Although it is not the purpose of this letter to address the technicalities, rest assured, that hour was at sunset as Nisan 14 commenced. Therefore, John is recording, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that this was the actual Passover meal about to take place, just as the other Gospel writers confirmed. This was the evening when the lambs were to be killed, and Christ knew this was the moment that God, the Father, had turned Him over to His enemies.

Had the Jews fulfilled the command in sacrificing the lambs properly, this is the moment they should have killed Jesus. Yet we know His crucifixion and death did not occur until the following morning. Why? Because the Jews had corrupted the keeping of Passover by that time, and were not fulfilling the law as ordained by God. Josephus states, in *Wars*, Book 6, chapter 9, section 3, "So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour till the eleventh, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice . . ." This corresponds to 3 to 5 P.M. Whether they were killing these Passover lambs on the afternoon of the 13th or the 14th, it is clear that by killing them in the afternoon *at all*—rather than waiting for sunset as God commanded—they were violating God's law. The technicalities can be argued in many directions, but what is clear is that the Jews were guilty of corrupting God's law through their own traditions at the time of Christ. "But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3). Attempting to say Christ contended with them only about added rituals, and not the keeping of the Holy Days, is pure speculation. Indications are that various

sects were already divided on the proper day for Pentecost by that time. The Talmud describes the rift between Sadducees and Pharisees—about the time of Christ—on this very issue (Talmud—Menahoth 65a). Why would we think the Jews would have safeguarded the keeping of Passover any better than they had Pentecost? No, what makes more sense is that the Jews had already merged Passover into the Feast by that time, just as they keep it today.

Jesus Christ told His disciples, ". . . With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). He did not state dogmatically that it was His *right* to eat it with them, but that He *desired* to eat it with them. Had the Jews done what they should have, once turned over to them at that moment by God, He should have been dead. Yet their corruption provided the means for Christ to eat that final Passover with the disciples, which was also according to His will. Jesus was still sacrificed on Nisan 14—Passover day—even though it was hours later than it should have been. But from the moment the Father gave Him over into their hands—at sunset on the beginning of Nisan 14—that requirement had been fulfilled, and the events set in motion. The Father and Jesus Christ did their part on time.

This was the explanation we were originally given in the church, which fit beautifully with all the facts we know to be true. Unlike many others today who were once part of that body, we accept these things at face value, because they were part of that original teaching we accepted as the revelation of Jesus Christ. Those going about now to prove and reprove every doctrine based on human scholarship, only argue themselves in circles. "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Accurate technical work will always support the truth in time, but human scholarship is never the proof—only the confirmation—for the true people of God. Therefore, we will not engage in debate with those seeking to undermine our original confidence. In the end, debating the technical merits of the Jews' passover is fruitless, especially since everyone will seek to massage evidence to fit a preconceived idea. But there is one technical argument we do need to address, and for a specific reason.

The Hagigah Theory

What is the Hagigah theory? It is one of those suppositions advanced by some who seek to prove the Jews were still keeping Passover at the same time as Christ. It is a theory attempting to explain John 18:28 and John 19:14 to counter the common understanding that the Jews had still not partaken of Passover by the morning Christ was crucified. Why would we be willing to single out this particular argument for analysis, while resisting the others? Because unfortunately, several years ago, before realizing this theory undermined the original teaching we received through Mr. Armstrong, we allowed a particular man to publish support for it in one of our articles entitled, *Passover and Pentecost—What are the Facts?* At the time, we had no reason to doubt the veracity of his technical work, or orientation toward the Truth. We accepted assertions about this theory at face value without looking deeper. That article has since been

pulled from circulation until it can be revised. The theory does not hold water, at least not for those who believe in the original doctrines we were taught through Mr. Armstrong's ministry.

The Hagigah theory is one of those which interprets the word *passover* to refer, not to the Pasch, but to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As we have already stated, this word can be applied to one, the other, or to the entire eight day Feast. Unfortunately, when a writer states that "it should be clear that John 18:28 and John 19:14 are not referring to the Passover service, but to the Feast of Unleavened Bread," this is simply not true. It is anything *but* clear!

Hagigah (or *chagigah*) is a Hebrew word meaning "festivity," and relates to the freewill peace offerings found in Numbers 10:10, Deuteronomy 14:26, and 2 Chronicles 30:22; those sacrifices offered on certain Holy Days. Unlike the Passover meal which specifically required a lamb or a goat, these voluntary sacrifices on high days could be taken from sheep and oxen, as well as from lambs and goats. The Hagigah theory advances the notion that the "passover" referred to in John 18:28 and John 19:14 was not the Passover sacrifice, but the voluntary Holy Day offerings—the *hagigah*—which would be offered on the first day of Unleavened Bread. From merely a technical interpretation of the words, this is certainly one possibility. However, the substantiation for this conclusion comes primarily from three sources: McClintock and Strong, s.v. "Passover"; a book by Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*; and the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, page 531.

In each case, these writers emphasize that entering the Praetorium would not have caused the Jews to be defiled for eating the Passover, because the Passover meal is eaten after sunset, when a new day is begun. Any defilement incurred in the morning would only have caused Levitical impurity for the day—until evening—and automatically have been cleansed by the arrival of a new day, at sundown. The Passover meal could therefore have been eaten without reservation, if the Jews were planning to eat their Passover meal that night. We are told therefore this "passover" must have referred instead to the *hagigah*, or voluntary feast offerings. It was the *hagigah* sacrifices which the Jews would have been unable to participate in, had they become defiled on that same morning.

But what is the problem with this conclusion? The one assumption made by each of these scholars, is that Christ was crucified on the Holy Day, the first day of Unleavened Bread! And this belief is required for the theory to stand. The writers tell us the *hagigah* sacrifices were offered on the morning of the first full pascal day (the Holy Day). Believing as these scholars do, that the Jews were standing at the gates of the Praetorium on the morning of that Holy Day, the priests were preparing *in just a few hours* to offer the voluntary feast sacrifices in the Temple. Because there would be no new day commencing between their early morning encounter with Pilate and their sacrifices in the Temple later the same morning, they would be ceremonially impure, and unable to sacrifice.

If it is true Christ was tried, convicted, and crucified on the first day of Unleavened Bread, this theory makes perfect sense (Consequently, these men also believe that high day was on Friday). But if, as we have already shown, Christ died on *the preparation day*—before the beginning of that Holy Day—the concept falls apart. Why? If we are correct that the trial of Jesus occurred on the morning of the preparation day before the Feast began, this means the festival sacrifices—the *hagigah*—would not be offered until the following morning. By the scholars' own logic, the priest's Levitical impurity would be removed at sunset, and they would be free to offer the *hagigah* on the following morning, just as they would have been free to eat the Passover after sunset. The only way one can apply different rules for the Passover vs. the *hagigah*, is if you believe one of them was to occur before the setting of the next sun. But if you do not believe that Christ was crucified on the high day, you cannot attach yourself to the Hagigah theory. For someone to quote the three scholars referenced above, and then state this proves Christ partook of the Passover at the same time as the Jews—on the beginning of the fourteenth—is illogical.

But if it is true that ceremonial impurity would have been removed at sunset, does that not give us problems, believing that the Jews were planning to eat their Passover meal after sunset, on the beginning of the Feast day? Not at all. Remember, we have already seen from Josephus that the Jews were sacrificing their Passover lambs in the afternoon. If it is true these sacrifices were made on the preparation day—before the beginning of the Feast at sunset—entering the Praetorium early that morning would have made them Levitically impure for sacrifices later that same afternoon. Second Chronicles, chapter thirty, gives the account of Hezekiah's great Passover in the second month, as many of the Israelites were restored into a relationship with God once again. However, verses 15–17 show that because many of the people were not clean, the priests—who had already sanctified themselves—offered Passover lambs on behalf of the impure. This confirms that it was not only important for the priests to be ceremonially clean to *eat* the Passover, but to be clean *for participating in the killing of the lambs!* If the Jews really were killing their lambs in the afternoon, before sunset, it is not hard to understand why they would not have wanted to defile themselves earlier in the day.

Is this explanation any more verifiable from history than the other? No. But it is at least as credible as any other hypothesis. The only difference is, this explanation does not do violence to the revelation we received through the ministry of God's chosen servant in these last days. We accept that original teaching as the Word of Jesus Christ Himself, not that of any man's creation. Whether we can find a technical explanation to defend that revealed truth against those who assault it with their scholarship, makes little difference. We will not be swayed by any argument—no matter how sound it may seem at the moment—if it refutes that which we already know to be Truth. We live by faith. But in this particular case, as with many, the technicalities actually support the Truth better than they do the false premises of the scholars who conjure them. God did not leave us in doubt and confusion, if we know the proper basis for evaluation.

Brethren, in spite of the myriad controversies swirling among the deceived minds of this world about the Passover—including their greatest scholars—we do not have to live in such darkness, if we were of those called to a knowledge of God's Truth. That which we were taught by Jesus Christ through the ministry of Mr. Armstrong provides the answers to these and so many other questions that have baffled mankind for centuries. We do not have to wonder about Christ's last Passover, or feel unsure whether the Apostle John contradicted the other Gospel writers. Knowing the Truth allows us—by a great miracle—to understand what a beautiful mosaic God's plan really is. It fits together perfectly—every piece in its proper place—bespeaking the awesome glory of God's work on this earth.

May you each hold fast to that Truth, to love it, and to never let it go.

Your faithful servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby